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Process for fabricating tough polyethylene terephthalate articles with low gas and organic liquid permeability.

Tough articles having low permeability to organic liquids and vapors are melt-fabricated from a blend of polyethylene terephthalate and a toughening polymer, which can be an α -olefin/ α , β -unsaturated carboxylic copolymer, an ionomer derived from such copolymer by neutralization with magnesium or zinc ions, or an E/X/Y copolymer in which E is ethylene, X being a lower alkyl acrylate, methacrylate, or ethacrylate, and Y being glycidyl methacrylate or glycidyl acrylate,

by observing conditions such that crystallization of polyethylene terephthalate is minimized, such as by maintaining the surfaces of melt-fabricating equipment in contact with the polymer blend below 100°C or by rapidly quenching the article if made at a higher temperature, and by avoiding the presence of nucleating agents in the polymer blend.

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PROCESS FOR FABRICATING TOUGH POLYETHYLENE TEREPHTHALATE ARTICLES WITH LOW GAS AND ORGANIC LIQUID PERMEABILITY

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Field of the Invention: This invention relates to tough polyethylene terephthalate articles with low organic liquid and vapor permeability and to a process for making such articles.

State of the Art: Polyethylene terephthalate - (PET) is widely used in making containers, i.e., for fluids, as well as in packaging films and wraps. It also is widely used in combination with various other resins for fabrication of other types of articles by such techniques as extrusion, injection molding, and thermoforming. The normal commercial PET resin does not have good toughness and therefore often is modified by the addition of toughening agents such as, e.g., elastomers or soft polyolefins; see, for example, U.S. Patent 4,172,859 (to Epstein) and British Patent 1,208,585 (to Imperial Chemical Industries), U.S. Patent 3,435,093 (to Cope) discloses blends of PET with copolymers of ethylene with α , β -unsaturated carboxylic acids and their salts.

In normal fabrication of injection-molded PET articles, or extruded articles such as films or fibers, or blow-molded containers, those articles are processed or modified so as to obtain maximum PET crystallinity. In the case of blow-molded containers such as carbonated beverage bottles, this is usually accomplished by molecular orientation (e.g., by stretching) and often followed by heat setting and annealing (Wyeth U.S. 3,733,309). In injection molding or thermoforming, crystallinity of the PET resin is promoted by keeping the mold hot - (normally over 100°C) by using heated oil. Various nucleating agents such as, e.g., talc are often added to PET resin compositions to induce crystallization (Furukawa U.S. 3,368,995). Both nucleating agents and plasticizers must always be used to obtain tough, fully crystallized products having good surface characteristics when molten PET resin is shaped in standard water cooled molds, below about 100°C (see Deyrup U.S. 4,352,904 and U.S. 4,486,564). The above-cited patents stress the need to fully crystallize PET, to improve the properties of the articles made therefrom.

Thus, for injection molding in particular, it has normally been found essential to extensively modify polyethylene terephthalate to obtain satisfactory mechanical properties such as notched impact strength, stiffness, and tensile strength. As a result,

injection molded containers of such modified polyethylene terephthalate, while providing excellent barrier properties; are too expensive for many applications.

It would be desirable to produce PET-based fabricated articles such as containers, films, tubing, etc., which would combine toughness with satisfactory barrier properties with respect to organic liquids and vapors, and which could be made in a less expensive and simpler manner, so that such articles could be mass-produced to satisfy market needs. In particular, it is desirable to produce PET articles such as paint cans and the like for commercial products containing organic liquids, especially hydrocarbon solvents or diluents.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

According to this invention, there is now provided a process for fabricating tough articles having low permeability to many organic liquids and vapors, wherein a blend of 45-95 weight percent of PET with 5-55 weight percent of a copolymer of an α -olefin having 2-5 carbon atoms with an α , β -unsaturated carboxylic acid having 3-5 carbon atoms, or an ionomer obtained by a complete or partial neutralization of such a copolymer to form a zinc or magnesium salt of the carboxylic acid, or a blend of PET with an ethylene/glycidyl group-containing copolymer is melt-processed in shaping equipment such as, e.g., injection molding, blow molding, or extrusion equipment under conditions minimizing crystallization; especially, by avoiding the addition of nucleating agents to the blend; by maintaining the equipment surfaces in contact with the blend at a temperature lower than about 100°C, preferably less than 90°C, and even more preferably less than 50°C; and by quenching rapidly below such temperatures when fabricating in equipment operating at a higher temperature, for achieving maximum toughness.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

PET employed in the process of this invention is a commercial product available from several sources. Preferably, it should have an inherent viscosity of about 0.4 to 4.0 dL/g.

The term "copolymer", as used in the present specification and claims, means a polymer obtained by copolymerization of at least two monomers; it is not limited to a product of copolymerization of only two monomers.

The copolymer of an α -olefin with an α , β -unsaturated carboxylic acid should contain at least 70 weight % of α -olefin component and at most 30 weight % of α , β -unsaturated carboxylic acid component, the carboxylic acid groups being randomly distributed throughout the copolymer molecule. The carboxylic acid groups can be neutralized with zinc or magnesium cations to any degree within the full range of 0-100%. Neutralization with alkali metal ions is undesirable because it promotes PET crystallization. The preferred α -olefin is ethylene; other α -olefins include, for example, propylene, 1-butene, and 1-pentene. Representative unsaturated carboxylic acids include, for example, acrylic acid, methacrylic acid, monoethyl and monomethyl maleate, monoethyl and monomethyl fumarate, monomethyl and monoethyl itaconate, ethacrylic acid, maleic acid, fumaric acid, and itaconic acid.

A third ethylenically unsaturated monomer may be present in those copolymers, especially an acrylic ester or vinyl ester, for example: butyl acrylate, methyl methacrylate, or vinyl acetate. When the copolymer is a terpolymer of ethylene with an

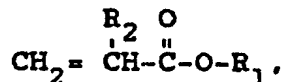
α , β -unsaturated carboxylic acid and with a third ethylenically unsaturated monomer, the respective weight proportions of these monomers are: ethylene 40 to 90%, α , β -unsaturated carboxylic acid 0.5-20%, and the third ethylenically unsaturated monomer 10-40%. The carboxylic groups, as in the case of dipolymers, can be unneutralized or neutralized to any degree with zinc or magnesium cations.

All such copolymers are generally known, and some of those copolymers are commercially available, while others can be prepared by free-radical copolymerization, preferably in solution in a hydrocarbon solvent, either in liquid or in vapor phase. When the desired proportion of carboxylic acid is small, the polymerization is preferably carried out in a continuous process, adjusting the monomer ratios to their respective polymerization activities and limiting the residence time to prevent complete conversion of the α -olefin to polymer.

The ethylene/glycidyl group containing copolymer is a copolymer E/X/Y, where the monomers E, X, and Y are as follows:

E is ethylene and comprises 40-90 weight percent of the ethylene copolymer;

X is a carboxylic ester represented by the formula



where R₁ is an alkyl group with 2-8 carbon atoms, preferably 4-6 carbon atoms, especially 4 carbon atoms; and

R₂ is H, CH₃, or C₂H₅, preferably H or CH₃, especially H; and X comprises 10-40 weight percent, preferably 15-35 weight percent, especially 20-35 weight percent of the E/X/Y copolymer; and

Y is selected from the group consisting of glycidyl methacrylate and glycidyl acrylate, and Y comprises 0.5-20 weight percent, preferably 2-10 weight percent, especially 3-8 weight percent of the E/X/Y copolymer.

Additional comonomers, e.g. CO and methyl acrylate, can also be present in minor amount, provided that the essential characteristics of the ethylene copolymer such as melt viscosity and toughening ability are not substantially altered.

The above copolymers can be prepared by direct copolymerization, for example, copolymerization of ethylene, glycidyl methacrylate or glycidyl acrylate, and the above-defined carboxylic ester, X, in the presence of a free-radical polymerization

initiator at elevated temperatures, preferably 100-270°C, and most preferably 130-230°C, and at elevated pressures, preferably at least 70 MPa, and most preferably 140-350 MPa.

In addition to the above two required components, the polymer blend may also contain a third polymer which is chemically inert to the other two polymers under melt-processing conditions. Typical such additional polymers include, for example, various polyolefins such as, e.g., polyethylene, polypropylene, and ethylene/propylene copolymers; polystyrene; ethylene/vinyl acetate copolymers, ethylene/alkyl acrylate copolymers, and the like, and mixtures thereof. The amount of third polymer, if present, can be at most equal to the weight of α -olefin/ α , β -unsaturated carboxylic acid copolymer or E/X/Y copolymer, the total amounts of all polymers in the blend being such that the PET proportion remains within the 45-99% range.

The preferred carboxylic group-containing copolymer is ethylene/methacrylic acid (E/MAA) copolymer, and its preferred content is about 20-40% by weight of the blend. The preferred E/MAA

copolymer contains about 80-97 weight % of ethylene and 3-20 weight % of methacrylic acid, which can be either free or converted to any desired extent to its zinc or magnesium salt.

The preferred E/X/Y copolymer is one where X is n-butyl acrylate and Y is glycidyl methacrylate or acrylate. The preferred weight proportions of the monomers are: ethylene, 40 to 90%; n-butyl acrylate 10 to 40%; and glycidyl methacrylate or acrylate, 0.5 to 20.0%.

Fillers normally are not desired because their presence increases permeability to organic liquids and vapors, unless their surface adhesion is closely controlled. Yet, small amounts of non-nucleating fillers, such as e.g., pigments, carbon black, or calcium carbonate, up to about 10% of the total polymer weight, can be tolerated. Fillers should be finely ground to minimize the possible adverse effect of those additives on the barrier properties of the blend.

The compositions are thoroughly melt blended in melt-processing equipment such as, e.g., extruders, roll mills, and Banbury mixing equipment, either in a separate operation prior to fabrication into articles or in conjunction with such fabrication, e.g., by injection molding or extrusion into a sheet or a film. The fabrication itself is conducted under conditions inhibiting extensive PET crystallization.

Since it is in practice difficult to directly measure the temperature of the fabricating equipment surfaces in contact with the polymer blend, the temperature of the coolant passed through the equipment, e.g., a mold, close to the surfaces in contact with the polymer blend is measured. For the purpose of the present disclosure and claims, those temperatures are believed to be so close to each other that they are taken to be the same.

The polymer blends used in the present invention have good barrier properties to many organic liquids, including such as are used commercially as solvents, diluents, or dispersants. Typical such organic liquids include, for example, aliphatic and aromatic hydrocarbons, ketones, alcohols, ethers, and esters. The polymer blends used in the present invention also have good barrier properties to the vapors of such organic liquids.

The process of the present invention is particularly suitable for melt-fabricating articles such as, for example, containers, container parts and closures, and films or sheets; especially, paint cans, caulking tube tips and plungers, toothpaste tube tips, container screwcaps, cereal box liners, waste water pond covers, and film for casings used for industrial explosives.

The invention is now illustrated by representative examples of certain preferred embodiments thereof, where all parts, proportions, and percentages are by weight unless otherwise indicated.

Test articles were either tumblers or films. The tumblers were approximately 9.5 cm high, with a diameter of 7 cm at the top and 5 cm at the bottom and with a wall thickness of about 1.25 mm, which were injection-molded in a Cincinnati Milacron machine model with a 150 ton clamp pressure. The mold was cooled with running water having a temperature of 18-20°C.

Toughness of wall sections of those test tumblers was determined in a drop impact test, using several samples for statistical evaluation of the results. Test data, which originally were obtained in British units, were converted to SI units.

For comparison, some of the molded articles were annealed to induce crystallization by heating in an oven for 24 hours at 110°C.

Crystallinity of the molded articles was determined by differential scanning calorimetry (DSC), using a Du Pont thermal analyzer 1090 attachment. The heating rate was 10°C per minute. The exotherm peak obtained during the heating cycle is representative of amorphous PET, which crystallizes during the operation, while the freezing exotherm during the cooling cycle is representative of the total crystallizable PET.

Permeability of the unannealed tumblers was determined by filling each tumbler with approximately 100 g of technical grade xylene, sealing it with a tight metal lid, and determining weight loss after storage at 60°C for 688 hrs. Results of three tests were averaged.

Film permeability tests were carried out as follows:

The films were made by a blowing process using a 2.5 cm Killion extruder and 2.5 cm circular blown film die. The films were quenched by using nitrogen gas. The films were about 1-2 mil (0.025-0.05 mm) thickness. These films were tested for permeability barrier properties for xylene vapors by using the film as a lid in an aluminum cup of 5 cm diameter and containing about 50 ml of xylene. The permeability was determined by weight loss at ambient temperature and pressure conditions.

Examples 1-5

The results are summarized in the following Table I. In all cases, the resin was a blend of 65% of PET and 35% of a copolymer described below:

Example 1 -E/MAA 96:4 (melt index = 0.8);

Example 2 -E/MAA 90.7:9.3 (melt index = 2.6);

Example 3 -E/MAA 90:10, 71% neutralized with zinc;

Example 4 -E/isobutyl acrylate/MAA 80:10:10, 73%
neutralized with zinc;

Permeability tests were carried out on unan-
nealed tumblers as described above.

Example 5 - Same as Example 4, but also con-
tained 0.3% of pentaerythritol tetrastearate 5
(lubricant).

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(1) The result shows that material is fully crystallized.
(2) No failure

As Molded:							Annealed		
Ex- sample	Drop Impact Strength (J)	DSC		Total Xylene Loss g (Avg)	Crystall.		Freezing		Drop Impact Strength (J)
		Crystall. Exotherm °C	J/g		Exotherm(1) °C	J/g	Exotherm °C	J/g	
1	35.9	117.8	14.4	0.56	None	194.3	26.9	2.7	
2	37.06 (2)	116.2	13.8	2.4	None	29.8	3.27	2.4	
3	37.06 (2)	116.5	13.0	0.26	None	28.3	20.3	0.26	
4	37.06 (2)	115.3	17.7	3.5	None	41.2	33.9	3.5	
5	37.06 (2)	116.9	14.2	1.4	None	29.9	36.1	1.4	

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Examples 6-7

Drop impact strength tests were repeated using a resin which was a blend of 70% PET and 30% of E/MAA Copolymer. The results are given below in Table II.

Table II

<u>Example</u>	<u>Carboxylic Copolymer</u>	<u>Impact Strength (joules)</u>	
		<u>As Molded</u>	<u>Annealed</u>
6	A(1)	30.28	1.41
7	B(2)	37.06	2.7

(1) Ethylene/methacrylic acid (96:4) copolymer having a melt index of 0.8.

(2) Ethylene/methacrylic acid (90:10) copolymer 71% neutralized with zinc cation.

This table shows more clearly that shaping in a cold mold produces a much tougher article than shaping with annealing.

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Examples 8-9

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Films were made and tested for xylene permeability as described above. The test was run for 456.5 hours under ambient temperature and pressure conditions. The results are summarized in Table III, below.

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Table IIIComposition

<u>Example</u>	<u>PET</u>	<u>Ethylene Polymer A (1)</u>	<u>Ethylene Polymer B (2)</u>	<u>Film Thickness (mm)</u>	<u>Loss (grams)</u>
8	60	40		0.05	0.05
9	60	30	10	0.05	0.23

(1) Ethylene/methacrylic acid (96:4) copolymer

(2) Ethylene/methacrylic acid (90:10) copolymer,
71% neutralized with zinc cation

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(b) copolymers of ethylene with an alpha, beta-unsaturated carboxylic acid and a third ethylenically unsaturated monomer, their respective weight ratios in the polymer being 40-95%, 0.5-20%, and 10-40%;

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(c) ionomers obtained by a complete or partial neutralization of a copolymer of paragraph (a) or (b) with zinc or magnesium ions, and

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(d) an E/X/Y copolymer, where the monomers E, X, and Y are as follows:

E is ethylene and comprises 40-90 weight percent of the ethylene copolymer;

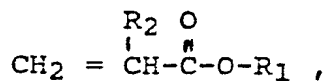
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X is a carboxylic ester represented by the formula

Claims

1. In a process for melt-fabricating articles from blends of 45-95 weight percent of polyethylene terephthalate with 5-55 weight percent of a toughening polymer selected from

(a) copolymers of at least 70 weight % of an alpha-olefin having 2-5 carbon atoms with at most 30 weight % of an alpha, beta-unsaturated carboxylic acid,



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where R₁ is an alkyl group with 2-8 carbon atoms; and

R₂ is H, CH₃, or C₂H₅; and X comprises 10-40 weight percent of the E/X/Y copolymer; and

Y is selected from the group consisting of glycidyl methacrylate and glycidyl acrylate, and Y comprises 0.5-20 weight percent of the E/X/Y copolymer,

said blends containing 0-10% based on the total polymer weight of a finely ground, non-nucleating filler,

the improvement of conducting the melt-fabrication under conditions minimizing polyethylene terephthalate crystallization, preferably in the absence of a nucleating agent, and preferably keeping the surfaces of melt-fabricating equipment in contact with the polymer blend below 100°C, and especially below 50°C,

whereby a tough article having low permeability to gases and to organic liquids selected from the class consisting of aliphatic and aromatic hydrocarbons, ketones, alcohols, ethers, and esters is obtained.

2. A process of Claim 1 wherein the toughening polymer is a copolymer of ethylene with an unsaturated carboxylic acid.

3. A process of Claim 2 wherein the unsaturated carboxylic acid is methacrylic acid.

4. A process of Claim 3 wherein the amount of methacrylic acid in the copolymer is 3-20 weight %.

5. A process of Claim 3 or 4 wherein the amount of copolymer of ethylene with methacrylic acid is 20-40 weight percent of the blend with polyethylene terephthalate.

6. A process of Claim 3, 4 or 5 wherein the copolymer of ethylene with methacrylic acid is neutralized with magnesium or zinc ions.

7. A process of Claim 1 wherein the toughening polymer is a copolymer of ethylene with an α, β-unsaturated carboxylic acid and with an acrylic ester or a vinyl ester.

8. A process of Claim 7 wherein the ester is isobutyl acrylate, and the acid is methacrylic or acrylic acid.

9. A process of Claim 1 wherein the toughening polymer is an E/X/Y copolymer, wherein R₂ is hydrogen or methyl, and X comprises 15-35, preferably 20-35 weight percent of the E/X/Y copolymer, while Y comprises 2-10, preferably 3-8 weight percent of the E/X/Y copolymer.

10. A process of Claim 9 wherein R₁ is an alkyl group with 4-6 carbon atoms.

11. A process of Claim 10 wherein the toughening polymer is an E/X/Y terpolymer, wherein X is n-butyl acrylate and Y is glycidyl methacrylate, preferably wherein the respective weight proportions of n-butyl acrylate and glycidyl methacrylate are 10 to 40% and 0.5 to 20%.

12. A process of Claim 1 wherein a portion of the toughening polymer is replaced with another polymer which is chemically inert to the other two polymers under melt-fabricating conditions, its amount being at most equal to that of the toughening polymer of the type recited in Claim 1, the other polymer preferably being selected from the class consisting of polyolefins, polystyrene, ethylene/vinyl acetate copolymers, ethylene/alkyl acrylate copolymers, and mixtures thereof.

13. A process of any one of Claims 1 to 12 wherein the melt-fabricated article is rapidly quenched below a temperature of 100°C, preferably below 50°C.

14. An article fabricated by the process of any one of the Claims 1-13, which is a container, a paint can, a film or sheet, a liner for a box containing a food product, a waste water pond cover, a film for an explosive-containing casing, a caulking tube or toothpaste tube tip or plunger, a container closure, or a screw cap.

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